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CONTENTS

LAVENDER

FEATURE: CHILDREN & FAMILY

- 16** Kicks with Kids
- 20** Learn to Play, Play to Learn
- 26** OutFront: Behind in Ethics
- 27** When GLBT Nonprofits Lose Their Way
- 28** Dateland: Missing the Diaper Years

OUR LAVENDER

- 8** From the Editor
- 10** A Word in Edgewise
- 33** Letter to the Editor

OUR SCENE

- 12** Rochester PrideFest
- 14** Arts: Spotlight

OUR LIVES

- 30** Leather Life

OUR AFFAIRS

- 32** Books

OUR HOMES

- 34** Ride Review

OUR RESOURCES

- 40** The Network
- 41** Classifieds
- 42** Community Connection

OUR VOICES

- 37** Skirting the Issues

ON THE COVER

Whether you're a parent, a professional, or a newbie aunt, uncle, grandparent, or caregiver, you'll find plenty of resources for fun with kids in this issue, including the newly revamped Minnesota Children's Museum.
Photo by Bruce Silcox

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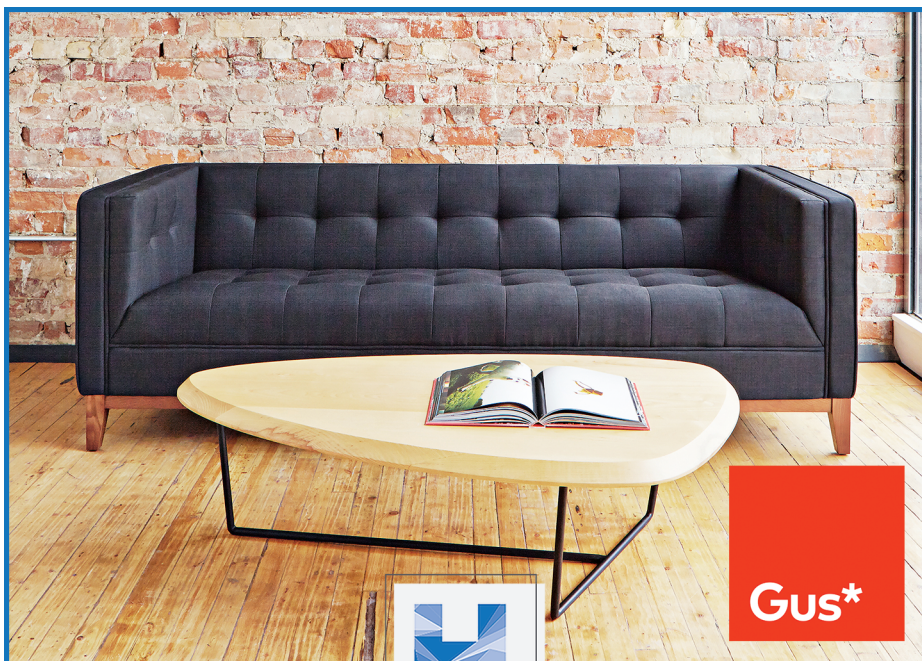
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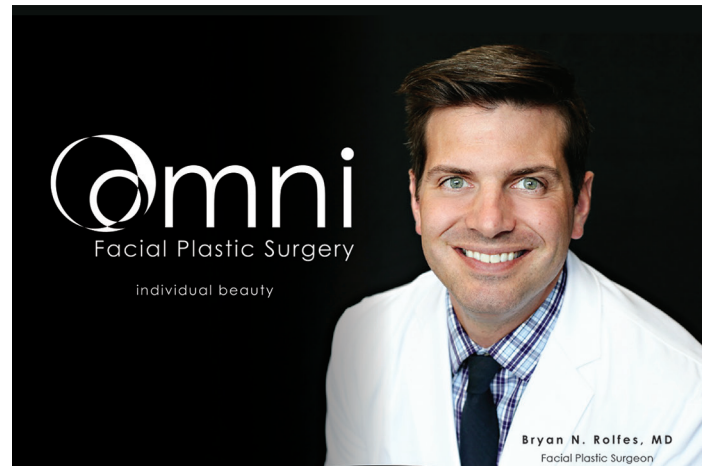
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Growing Younger

Now that I'm 40, I've pretty much moved past the mourning involved with moving past the window of time when I'm biologically able to have children. What an odd weighting of the scales that procreation is possible such a shorter length of time for those with eggs compared to those with sperm. It's angered me. It's saddened me. It's made me raise my fist in the air in frustration and futility. Yet here we are. Of course, of course, of course, biological birth is not the only method of having children and a family and I'm open to all the options. And, of course, of course, of course, we all accept the conditions and choices in our lives in different ways at different times. I'm at the point of radical acceptance: I don't like it, and I accept it.

I know I am not unique in my situation. Some people in this community also really want kids, but don't have them yet. Some people in this community had kids as part of an opposite-sex couple before they came out of the closet. Some have had kids with a same-sex partner or spouse using reproductive assistance. Some adopt. A high number of people in this community tend to adopt special needs kids, even. Many are single parents, many are combined families. Pets hold different places in families from central to peripheral. But, many people are still wondering how the concept of family works into their lives. So many people in this community are considering becoming parents after being rejected by their own. Some wonder if it's too heteronormative to buy into having a nuclear family of parent/parent/child/children. Some crave it. Some can't figure out how to afford the prospect, especially if there's lab work

involved. None of it is easy. But what is very clear is that there's plenty of diversity in the community regarding the topic of children and family.

We've covered children and family from a number of angles: surrogacy, adoption, artificial insemination, combinations of existing children. This issue is more geared toward the child-free aunts, uncles, grandparents, or volunteers who work with kids. Yes, parents will get plenty out of the pages, but parents may already be familiar with the fun places to go and things to do around the cities and the state. In this issue, we've got a list of resources for those who are staring down the barrel of a weekend with the kids who aren't yours and wondering what the heck to do with them. Oh, those are some of my favorite times. As an aunt to a sibling duo of kids who are now 11 and 14, those have been my best days. The tried-and-true places like the Science Museum of Minnesota and Izzy's for ice cream are always a hit, but the surprises like Minnesota's Largest Candy Store have become new destinations on our activity rotation.

The summer is here, kids are loose, and I hope you get to spend some time with some. They are a reprieve from so much of the adult concerns in the world today. Someone once wrote an article about following a three-year-old around for a morning, just on their time and agenda, doing what they want to do...and it was apparently the most relaxing thing. Hang out on the floor a while, play with some toys, have a snack, and just be.

With you and with thanks,

Andy ■



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That's Just the Way It Is

I've always loved *The Lawrenceville Stories*, written by Owen Johnson in the early years of the 20th Century. Johnson wrote about his prep school, using friends' actual nicknames, "The Varmint," "The Tennessee Shad," "Hungry Smeed," and particularly, "The Prodigious Hickey."

Hickey, on his way to becoming the Prodigious, pulls off increasingly disruptive pranks, ever suspected but never proved. Finally, after sending the entire school into a turmoil, he is summoned before the Doctor (headmaster), whom he has heretofore outfoxed. Now, he says only, "We're going to let you go." Hickey challenges, "For what reason?" "For no reason at all." To Hickey's "Do you call this justice?" the Doctor replies, "No, I call it a display of force."

Earlier this year, some ten students from the Harvard College Class of 2021 (2,056 students from 39,506 applicants) had their acceptances rescinded. The established Harvard College Class of 2021 Facebook group invited, "Join this group to meet your classmates, share where you're coming from, ask questions, keep in touch, etc. Your experience starts with the amazing peers around you, so stay connected."

A darker spin-off formed and some students, according to the *Har-*

vard Crimson, "sent each other memes and other images mocking sexual assault, the Holocaust, and the deaths of children. Some of the messages joked that abusing children was sexually arousing, while others had punchlines directed at specific ethnic or racial groups. One called the hypothetical hanging of a Mexican child 'piñata time.'"

The official Facebook clearly stated, "Harvard College reserves the right to withdraw an offer of admission under various conditions including if an admitted student engages in behavior that brings into question his or her honesty, maturity, or moral character."

Some have questioned free speech, but no student was told they couldn't post, just that they would not be speaking so at Harvard. Ever. Some mentioned that when incoming members of 2020 shared racist, sexist posts in an unofficial group, Harvard officials said only they were "troubled and disappointed" and shut it down.

Perhaps the University has matured. Perhaps Harvard, like *Lawrenceville's* Doctor, realizing they stand *in loco parentis* for all their charges, decided to use "force," or decided, to paraphrase the (disputed) words of Winston Churchill, that up with this we will no longer put. ■

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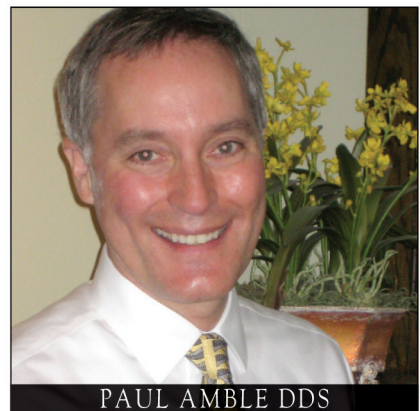
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A Community of Unity: Rochester PrideFest



Photos courtesy of GLCS of SE

With such a large and well represented GLBT community in the Twin Cities, it can often feel like Pride month is every month. However, in smaller communities throughout Minnesota, Pride month plays an important role in the GLBT community for its ability to put their voices in the foreground.

Rochester has been celebrating its PrideFest since 1997 when it was established under Mary Wallace and Darrel Waters and hosted in Central Park in the heart of Rochester. Although PrideFest wasn't originally recognized by the leadership of Rochester, current mayor of Rochester Ardele Brede commissioned a Pride Proclamation which made PrideFest an annual community sponsored event.

Ken Tollefsrud, chairperson for Gay Lesbian Community Service of Southeastern Minnesota (GLCS of SE MN), ensures that the event runs smoothly, legally, and operates in an educational, informative, and inclusive manner. Additionally, Tollefsrud and the rest of GLCS of SE MN is responsible for the events and vendors of Rochester PrideFest. "I recall several years ago we brought down the Tretter Panels from The Tretter Collection in Minneapolis. I really enjoyed this event. It is numerous panels that show the history of our LGBTQIA community and the struggles and successes," says Tollefsrud.

A popular event this year is the Rochester Girls presentation of Dragagonza on July 21 at the International Event Center by Rochester International Airport. This event is a tradition that was initially separate from PrideFest but has unofficially become the "kick-off" of Rochester PrideFest every year. Some other events that this year's PrideFest will feature include Drag Queen Dunk Tank, country music performed by Branded, a local Rochester band, and a Canvas and Chardonnay event on July 20. "We are also working with a local LGBT-affirming coffee house Café Steam and a local artist by the name of Sapphire McKnight to create a limited edition Pride coffee mug using our PrideFest theme. Our new venue [Soldiers Memorial Field Park] and dates [July 21-23] are welcome new additions as well. After last year's success, we determined that we had outgrown the space downtown at the Peace Plaza and wanted to get back out to more open family-friendly green spaces," Tollefsrud says.

Although Rochester is much smaller than the Twin Cities, it still boasts the same amount of pride. "Our Pridefest is more simple, more

in-sync with the original intentions of the purpose of gay Pride and PrideFest events. Granted, we don't carry the expensive headline acts of some larger PrideFests, but we do remain true to the original purpose of gay Pride in celebration. The true reason to celebrate Pride is to reflect on our history and past, remember our struggles and accomplishments, and to continue to remain visible in the community. We still have a lot of work ahead of us," says Tollefsrud. Many who attend Twin Cities Pride also enjoy Rochester PrideFest for its change of pace but similar Pride values.

Tollefsrud reports that Rochester PrideFest increases consistently each year. With 2,400 attendees last year, people are anticipating large crowds from Rochester as well as surrounding communities. "It is because of this larger attendance that we determined to move to a larger area where we can grow," he says. The majority of attendees are high school juniors and seniors and other young adults, but several families, senior citizens, and all ages in between attend Rochester PrideFest.

While everyone has multiple reasons why they like to attend Rochester PrideFest, Tollefsrud says the unity is one of the main reasons he enjoys participating in the event so much. "The sense of unity and community—it is nice to see our community and the allies we have in support. With the struggles that the LGBTQIA community has faced these last couple of years as a major focus of the event, it is nice to get back to the unity and support of our community. I enjoy attending many area PrideFest events as it reminds me that we are not alone. We are a voice and an active group that will benefit our local, state, and national communities," says Tollefsrud.

While you may not live in Rochester or be familiar with its community events, Rochester PrideFest is a safe, fun and inclusive environment where people of all genders, sexualities, races, backgrounds, etc. can come together to celebrate their differences. Come to Rochester PrideFest and experience a united community that is proud to have pride. ■

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The Comedy of Errors. Photo by Lou Bedor III

THE COMEDY OF ERRORS

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www.classicalactorsensemble.org

The accomplished Classical Actors Ensemble is presenting William Shakespeare's wildly madcap and shortest play, *The Comedy of Errors*, at local parks and nature-centered areas. Actress Marika Proctor points out that "the comedy in this play hinges on our inability to control how our identity is perceived and the miscommunication, frustration, and resilience that comes with navigating how to understand each other. Shakespeare gives us not only one set of long-lost identical twins, but two—the premise is totally absurd, but the errors are entirely genuine. *The Comedy of Errors* delights in a complex web of crossed wires, nudging us to embrace life's chaos in order to figure out who we are, what we think, and how we feel. Like the colorful cast of characters in this play, we stand to be surprised along the way."

JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR

July 18–30
Ordway Center, 345 Washington St.
St. Paul
651-224-4222
www.ordway.org

The Ordway's outgoing Artistic Director James Rocco is staging the legendary and,

some would say, heretical 1971 rock opera by composer Andrew Lloyd Webber and lyricist Tim Rice. Whenever he revisits *Jesus Christ Superstar* we can ponder a quote by the classic gay French writer, Marcel Proust: "The true journey of discovery is not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes."

Rocco stresses the importance of respecting "a show that pushed musical theater into new territories. When it first appeared it was considered radical, rebellious, and edgy. It surprised and shocked audiences because it pushed the envelope—a show that revolutionized and changed musical theater while it contemplated and brought forth thoughts about the last seven days in the life of Jesus Christ."

Of course any telling or retelling of the Christ story includes the tyrannical Herod. Rocco points out that "in the score, King Herod is presented as a decadent and flamboyant King, an over-the-top, successful vaudevillian, steeped in show business tradition. This is in direct contrast to the sounds of Jesus and Judas who represent a revolution, a change, something new."

Ordway's revival will push the envelope even further with the crossgender casting of a woman in the role of Herod. Erin Schwab, one of the region's most beloved musical talents, is, in her words "thrilled to take on the challenge of playing a male role. I have listened to and loved this show since I was

a young girl playing all the parts along with the cast recording in my parents' basement. Most assuredly, the role I most connected with was King Herod. I was never Mary Magdalene, she was far too serious. I have never played a role that is a gender I don't identify with. James Rocco and I have met and discussed some ideas. It will certainly evolve as we rehearse and interact with each other."

Rocco adds, "The role of Herod needs a consummate performer. Erin is no doubt that." You will also see other popular veteran Twin Cities musical actors in this *Superstar*: Kersten Rodau, Julius Collins, Randy Schmeling, and Dieter Bierbauer.

MIGHT AS WELL BE DEAD: A NERO WOLFE MYSTERY

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St. Paul. 1956. A regretful mother hires a detective to track down her estranged son. He may be all the way over in Manhattan and possibly even wanted for murder! Park Square's summer thriller has gotten to be a "go to" annual theater experience.

Cast member Jim Pounds shares, "It is always great to see a new play in a familiar genre. If you love mysteries, you will love this show. Lots of suspects. Lots of possibilities

SPOTLIGHT

and complexity that makes it fun to try to unravel before the main character does. If you prefer, you can focus on the shifts in character for most actors and the comedy of which there is plenty. The audience at the first preview was very enthusiastic. There is even inter-generational banter which I appreciate!"

MOMENTUM: NEW DANCE WORKS FESTIVAL 2017

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www.thecowlescenter.org

Question: What have the Cowles Center for Dance & the Performing Arts, the Southern Theater, Movement Research NYC, and the Walker Art Center been partnering up for lately?

Answer: These arts organizations formed a panel and selected the following for the 12th annual Momentum Festival. Selected artists include Fire Drill (Emily Gastineau and Billy Mullaney), BLAQ (Deja Stowers), //CATHEDRAL\ (Dolo McComb), and STRONGmovement (Darrius Strong). Momentum Program Director Michele Steinwald points out that these artists "work from a very specific perspective within contem-



Might As Well Be Dead: A Nero Wolfe Mystery.
Photo by Petronella J. Ytsma

porary dance. They're also at points in their career where they're able to leverage the support that Momentum provides to influence future work or take them to the next step in their career."

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO ME?: PORTRAITS OF CHILDREN WITH INCARCERATED PARENTS

Through July 27

Cargill Hall Exhibit, Minneapolis Central Library, 300 Nicollet Mall, Minneapolis

www.hclib.org

Once again, Minneapolis Central Library

gives us a thought-provoking exhibit in its second floor Cargill Gallery. *What Will Happen to Me?* is a collection of stark photos from Howard Zehr's book about families and incarceration. We see mostly children of color whose parents are being held in American prisons.

Over two dozen photos look straight on into the eyes of children, emphasizing the innocence of those who, through no fault of their own, have become second-class citizens. Zehr has stated that they are often forgotten and are "profoundly affected by circumstances and policies that do not take their needs into account. We interviewed and did photographic portraits of children in a number of communities across the country."

Out of this the exhibit was created. Moreover, Zehr came to realize the burden put on caregivers, including family members and especially grandparents, who look after the children of those locked away. It points to a grave problem that ironically some in both major political parties have acknowledged passionately. Yet there seems to be no real effort at addressing of it. Perhaps efforts like Zehr's will help to shift that. ■

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Children
&
Family

kicks for kids

BY KASSIDY TARALA

MINNESOTA STATE FAIR →

Trying to beat the heat doing something fun with the younger ones? Looking for new places around Minnesota to add to your summer bucket list? Wanting to relive the days of your childhood with fun events and activities? If you answered “yes” to one or more, you’ll want to check out this list of kid-friendly places to add to your summer adventures.

Summer has “childhood” written all over it. From water parks to museums to trips to the zoo, summer is a season made for kids. Whether you have kids of your own or occasionally care for others’ kiddos, here is a list of places that are both fun for the youngsters and entertaining for the adults, too.

VALLEYFAIR

An amusement park, a water park, and a food festival all wrapped into one? Yes, please! Valleyfair is notorious for its vast array of roller coasters that are well-loved by adults such as the Corkscrew and the Looping Starship. But even if you’re not *this* tall, you can still enjoy Valleyfair’s rides. Planet Snoopy features several rides suitable for younger kids, or any fans of the Peanuts comic, and Soak City has slides of various sizes as well as Breakers Bay Wave Pool, Ripple Rapids, and Barefoot Beach for a more relaxing atmosphere. Also, Valleyfair hosts several events including Midway Movies through August 30 and a Beach Bash held July 29-30. Valleyfair tickets can be purchased online for as low as



Photo by Robert Ferdinandt Visit Saint Paul

\$37, and season passes and group ticket prices are also available.
www.valleyfair.com

MINNESOTA STATE FAIR

With cookies and lemonade to die for, the Minnesota State Fair is a summer destination frequented by adults looking for a tasty treat and a fun outdoor concert. But its animal exhibits, Alphabet Forest, and Mighty Midway & Kidway make it a great

Photos courtesy of International Wolf Center



↑ international wolf center

place to take the kiddos this summer. The Mighty Midway & Kidway features rides that are suitable for visitors of all ages. Midway is the central location of adult rides, including the ferris wheel and numerous roller coasters, and Kidway has a long list of rides great for younger guests including a Tilt-A-Whirl, a Merry-Go-Round, and the giant slide. Other than rides, some great options for guests with kids are the Giant Sing Along, fair trivia, and strolling the seemingly never-ending rows of food and merchandise vendor booths. www.mnstatefair.org

MINNESOTA'S LARGEST CANDY STORE

Located in Jordan, Minnesota's Largest Candy Store has been offering every sweet treat you could ever dream of getting your hands on. Open daily from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Friday and 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. on weekends, "The Big Yellow Barn," as locals like to call it, is famous

for its thousands of candies. Open since 1978, Minnesota's Largest Candy Store boasts its old-fashioned way of doing things, including only accepting cash. The candy is as diverse as the store is large with flavors from as far away as Germany and Japan. A fan favorite is the 30-pound Gummy Snake, which costs \$79.99 and never fails to blow the kiddos' minds. www.facebook.com/MinnesotasLargestCandyStore

INTERNATIONAL WOLF CENTER

For a trip that is just as entertaining as it is educational, bring the kids to the International Wolf Center in Ely. Its Arctic Wolves, Ambassador Wolves, Wolves and Humans, Little Wolf, and Wolves and Wild Lands in the 21st Century exhibits are great for people of all ages, and they include several interactive elements that are great for the youngsters. The International Wolf Center also does several adventure programs including the Jr. Biologist Summer Camp and Wolves After Dark camp. Open daily from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. between June 12 and August 13, tickets to the International Wolf Center are \$13 for adults, \$11 for seniors, \$7 for children between 4 and 12 and free for members and anyone under the age of 4. www.wolf.org

NICKELODEON UNIVERSE AND SEA LIFE AQUARIUM

The Mall of America (MOA) attracts thousands of people every day from all around the world. With several floors of stores and restaurants, MOA can be both exciting and overwhelming. If you have a kid (or six) in tow, it can be a tricky place to navigate. Luckily, Nickelodeon Universe and SEA LIFE Aquarium provide the perfect place to entertain kids while keeping everyone in one area. Nickelodeon Universe has a special every Tuesday called Toddler Tuesdays, which features \$12.95 five-hour wristbands for toddlers. The park features fun rides and some of kids' favorite animated characters. SEA LIFE Aquarium is a more laid-back atmosphere where kids can view sea animals and even pet sharks and stingrays in the touch tanks. www.mallofamerica.com

BOAT AND BICYCLE RENTALS

Thanks to an increased popularity in boat and bicycle rentals, the lake isn't just enjoyable for boat owners anymore. Como Lake and Lake Calhoun offer great opportunities to enjoy the lake without breaking the bank. Wheel Fun Rentals has single and double Surrey bikes for \$18 and \$28 which can be ridden around Como Lake, Lake Calhoun, and several others. Also, they offer pedal and double pedal boats for \$20 and \$27, single and double kayaks for \$13 and \$20, canoes for \$20, and stand-up paddle boards for \$17. All offers are charged at an hourly rate and are sold at locations conveniently located right on the lakes' beaches. www.wheelfunrentals.com



Photos courtesy of Mall of America ®



↓ Nickelodeon Universe and Sea Life Aquarium

CONTINUED ON PAGE 18 →

COMO ZOO AND COMO TOWN

Who doesn't love free entertainment? The Como Zoo, located in St. Paul, offers an abundance of educational opportunities for the kiddos in your life. With Music Mondays, a Summer Flower Show, and a Polar Bear Program where kids can get up close to observe special enrichment, training, and zoo keeper talks, the Como Zoo will keep the youngsters entertained for hours. A special feature of the Como Zoo is Como Town, which reopens every summer and is ready for your little visitors. Como Town is a mini amusement park located right in Como Zoo. With rides, gift shops, and lots of snacks to choose from, Como Town is a great way for the kiddos to let off some steam. Tickets can be purchased for games and rides, but, just like the rest of the zoo, it's free to walk around and explore.

www.comozooconservatory.org

MINNESOTA ZOO

With a butterfly garden, Tropical Reef Dive Show, and a newly open Kangaroo Crossing, it's no wonder that the Minnesota Zoo is one of Minnesota's most popular attractions. Learn about different species from different parts of the world, pet some stingrays and fish, or watch one of the zoo's many shows including a bird show, shark feeding, and monk seal demo. Tickets are free for children under 2 years old, \$12 for seniors and children 3-12, and \$18 for adults. The zoo carousel and camel rides are an additional fee, but are charged at a discounted rate for members. Memberships range from \$59 to \$159 depending on the amount of people registered and allow for free admission all year, making the Minnesota Zoo a great place to take the kids a few times each month.

www.mnzoo.org

LAKE SUPERIOR MARITIME VISITOR CENTER

As if you need another reason to visit Duluth, the Lake Superior Maritime Visitor Center will give you one. Free for all visitors, it displays historic Canal Park in a way that is both breathtaking and educational. Exhibits include the Fresnel Lens, which was installed by the Coast Guard, several boats, and other interesting marine-related items. Be sure to visit the gift shop that is run by *Lake Superior Magazine*. With gifts, books, and other

souvenirs, the gift shop is an excellent place to take the kiddos to pick out a memento from your trip. Be sure to wander around outside and watch ships as they pass under the Aerial Lift Bridge.

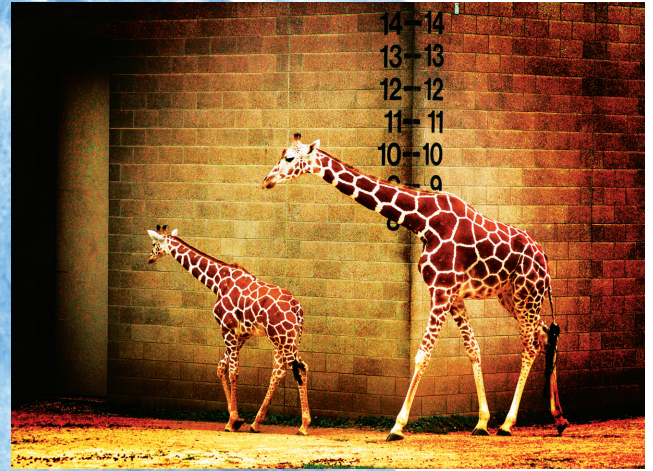
www.lsmma.com

LARK TOYS

Voted World's Greatest Toy Store by *Travel & Leisure Magazine*, LARK Toys is more than just your average toy shop. Other than a plethora of toys, LARK Toys has a carousel, a workshop, mini golf, a bookstore, and a cafe filled with treats. LARK Toys will definitely wow the kids, but it also has something to offer the adults. Memory Lane is an area of LARK Toys that features antique collections housed in cases and "storefronts" down a long hallway and scattered throughout the store. Also, the Curiosity Shoppe offers items for men and women as well as kitchen novelties, cards, home decor, and other small trinkets. Come curious and don't forget to visit the llamas!

www.larktoys.com

Photo by Nattapol Pornsalnuwat/Visit Saint Paul



Photos courtesy of Minnesota Zoo



Photo courtesy of Visit Duluth



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Children
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Family

Learn to PLAY, play to Learn

BY KASSIDY TARALA / PHOTOS BY BRUCE SILCOX

Museums are often accompanied by signs reading, “Do not touch,” “No photography,” “No sitting or standing on sculpture,” and others of the sort. At the Minnesota Children’s Museum, these signs are replaced by one necessary rule to follow: have fun.

The Minnesota Children’s Museum, founded in 1981 with its original location in downtown Minneapolis, was built on the philosophy that absolutely nothing in the museum would be accompanied by a “Do not touch” sign. Since the St. Paul location was built in 1995, the first renovation took place in 2017 when more play space was added to the front of the building, expanding the building from 65,000 to 74,000 square feet. Located in downtown St. Paul, the Minnesota Children’s Museum is easily accessible via the World Trade Center ramp by car or from the 10th Street Station by Green Line.

This summer is a perfect time to visit the newly reopened



Minnesota Children’s Museum as it now features 10 all-new exhibits that appeal to children from infants to teenagers. “Most of the exhibits have special areas we call Tot Spots, which are especially appealing to younger children,” says Sara Kerr, Director of Content and Communications. Some of these new exhibits include The Scramble, a four-story climbing adventure with a two-story slide; The Studio, a space with real tools and authentic materials where visitors can create things; and Super Awesome Adventure, which includes a green-screen climbing wall, laser maze, and carpet skate park. Additionally, there are two outdoor galleries that are open seasonally.

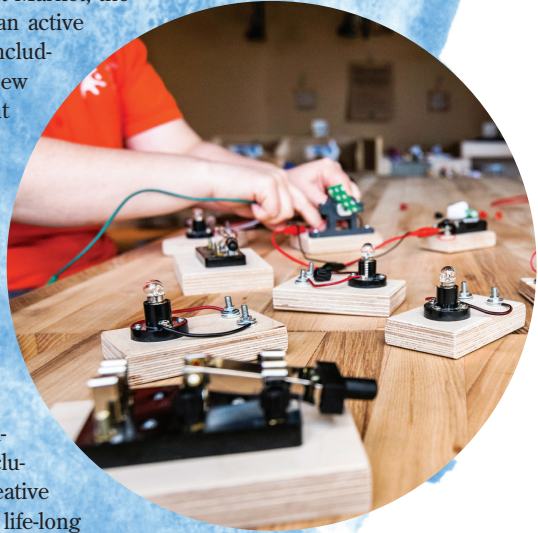
The Minnesota Children’s Museum appeals to children of all ages, adults included, for many reasons. Families frequently report that they feel there is always something for everyone at the museum. Since its renovations, the Minnesota Children’s Mu-

seum features a more open floor plan with improved sight lines, twice as many bathrooms including gender neutral ones, and a cafe with a coffee bar and more seating. “Honestly, it’s the fantastic exhibits that really wow the kids and adults. We often hear young voices complaining they don’t want to leave,” says Kerr.

Involved in several events including Rondo Days, Cinco de Mayo, and Little Mekong Night Market, the Minnesota Children’s Museum is an active participant in the community, including the GLBT community. “The new museum is designed to delight adults as well as provide playful learning experiences for children. We took special care to take into account the needs of adults: spaces that are comfortable for adults and children, adult-sized costumes in the galleries, graphics that include humor and a nod to nostalgia, and play experiences that adults also find fun. Plus, we truly believe that ALL children and families deserve a comfortable and inclusive place to relax, have fun, and expand on the creative and critical thinking skills that are essential to life-long learning,” says Senior Exhibit Developer Mary Weiland.

The Minnesota Children’s Museum is often appreciated for providing opportunities for fun and learning for everyone from children to adults. “We encourage adults to play, too! There are plenty of resting places if you just want to sit back and relax and watch where children’s imaginations take them, but you’re also totally welcome to crawl through The Scramble (as long as you brought your socks!), hold an imaginary tea party in Our World, experiment with air and water in Forces at Play, put together a sticker mural in Creativity Jam, build your own project side-by-side with the kids you brought at The Studio, and more. You can also scaffold kids’ learning by observing what they’re doing, asking open-ended questions, and posing challenges like, “That ping-pong ball went really high! It bounced off the ceiling and through the construction cone sculpture. What other directions can you send the ball? What happens if we add another pipe to the launcher? How is it doing that? How big can we make the launcher? How fast can we make the ball go?” says Gabby Santiago, Experience Supervisor/Museum Experience Lead.

Both Weiland and Santiago are members of the GLBT community and share their enjoyment both in working at the Minnesota Children’s Museum and participating in the exhibits, too. “It’s a really joyful place. We work here because we love kids, playing, and learning. We can’t wait to see the great discoveries our visitors make about themselves as they try new things for the very first time, whether that be going down a 17-foot slide, making a stop-motion



Children & Family

video, pretending to drive a fire truck, or tasting a basil leaf out on the Tip-Top Terrace. We want you to leave the museum feeling like the world just got a little more open and a little brighter,” Santiago says.

While the museum provides a different learning experience for each individual child, there is one thing that remains constant from person to person: you are bound to have fun.

“Every kid is different, and we definitely have ambitious four-year olds trying out sewing machines in The Studio and nostalgic 17-year olds happily playing house in Our World every day. But in general, older kids enjoy the challenges posed by The Scramble, The Studio, and Forces at Play. Our new ‘3 and under’ gallery Sprouts has its own water table, climbing structure, slide, and other features that echo other exhibits so groups with only small children can still have a full museum experience in a space just for them,” says Santiago.

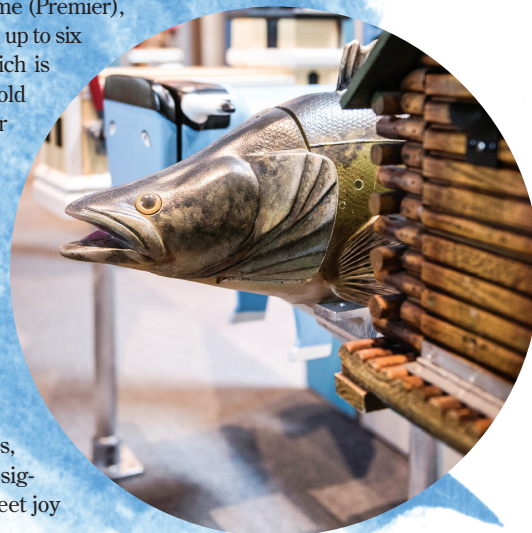
She says that some of her favorite exhibits include Creativity Jam and Imaginopolis because of the ease with which you can scale up or scale down the experience. Some kids build elaborate structures or enact epic stories, and others simply explore the materials. “All of those kinds of play are valid and great and beautiful,” she says.

Entry fees to the Minnesota Children’s Museum are \$12.95 for anyone between the ages of 1 and 101, and anyone under 1 or over 101 can get in for free.

Also, parking is \$5 for three hours in the connected World Trade Center ramp. Memberships are very popular among visitors because of the convenience and low price. “Memberships are two named adults of any gender and all the kids who live in their household and, depending on the level of the membership, may include up to two free guests each visit. So if your niece/nephew/sibling is named on a membership, be sure to check before your visit what kind of membership they have and whether it includes one free flex member each time (Deluxe), two free flex members each time (Premier),

or no free flex members but a \$2 discount on up to six people (all memberships, including All Play which is our free membership for families whose household income is below a certain level, Passport, and after the flex members have been used, Deluxe and Premier),” says Santiago.

Whether you’re 2, 22, or 82, the Minnesota Children’s Museum will surely have something that will interest you. Opportunities to play, learn, and expand your ideas are offered every day at the friendly, inclusive, and diverse community that makes up the Minnesota Children’s Museum. Bring your kids, your nieces and nephews or your significant other, and experience the sweet joy of being a kid again. ■



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 | **ECUMEN**

outfront: behind in ethics

BY JOHN TOWNSEND

Since last November's election the country has been passing through a turbulent period wherein fear seems to have often taken the upper hand. American GLBT citizens were warned by outgoing Senate Minority (and former Majority) Leader, Harry Reid (D-NV) and Broadway star, Brandon Dixon, from a curtain call for *Hamilton*, that we in the GLBT community had dreadful reason to worry about our rights as citizens with the impending elected Republican control of the government, federally and throughout the states. Even since the Inauguration there have been demonstrations and public meetings with politicians that have been rancorous. Some have even been violent and destructive of property.

Of course, parties and politicians come into power, and then are removed from power. That's how a democratic republic works. Thankfully, the three branches of the government have a unique set of checks and balances between them and within them to counter extremes. And when extremes occasionally take root, then there is opportunity for those extremes to be reckoned with. This means the crucial necessity having a cool head and retaining the ability to rationally and civilly discuss disagreements.

Unfortunately, rhetoric from various quarters has been hyperbolic and inflammatory. The English language has become misused. Feelings of persecution have sometimes been exploited. Worse still, some GLBT community leaders have fallen under the spell.

On Nov.17 Lavender Media received a fundraising letter email from OutFront Minnesota, the state's primary GLBT advocacy nonprofit organization. That letter stated a truly alarming claim when it said "Many young queer and transgender people are committing suicide in wake of the election results." Nothing signifies the height and zenith of despair as consummately as suicide. It should never be taken lightly, or worse yet, as a way to score political points and gather financial contributions.

When asked for proof of those transgender people who committed suicide in the wake of the election results, OutFront could provide none. No death certificates from coroners or obituaries have been made available. OutFront's Executive Director Monica Meyer says she was respon-

sible for sending the fundraising email in question.

Meyer has not been reprimanded but OutFront Board President Dan Hawkins says, "I wouldn't have phrased it that way. I don't think it was 100% accurate. Institutions with much more power do this sort of thing every single day. I thought the wording was unfortunate, but it pales in comparison with what's going on with much bigger institutions. Government organizations have so much more power than a little nonprofit."

What is truly unfortunate is that this statement makes the state's primary GLBT advocacy organization vulnerable to complaints under the Minnesota Statutes governing nonprofit organizations. In Minnesota Statute 309.5 PROHIBITED PRACTICES Subd. 5. False or deceptive practices, it states that misleading statements are prohibited.

What might the penalty be then? "Minnesota Statute 309.57 DISTRICT COURT JURISDICTION, PENALTIES, ENFORCEMENT. Subdivision 1. General. The court may make any necessary order or judgment including, but not limited to, injunctions, restitution, appointment of a receiver for the defendant or the defendants's assets, suspension of the defendant's registration, awards of reasonable penalties up to \$25,000 for each violation of 309.50 to 309.61. In ordering injunctive relief, the attorney general shall not be required to establish irreparable harm but only a violation of statute or that the requested order promotes the public interest. The court may, as appropriate, enter a consent judgment or decree without the finding of illegality."

OutFront could not support its claims that many young queer and transgender people had committed suicide in the wake of the election results, only nine days after the polls closed. Minnesota statutes prohibit misleading statements such as the one OutFront used in its fundraising efforts. OutFront's assertion that much bigger or powerful institutions have used worse wording does not justify deceiving the public.

Moreover, OutFront's suggestion that many youngsters are killing themselves to cope with election results legitimizes suicide as a solution and it trivializes self-murder, what Shakespeare's *Hamlet* calls "self-slaughter," as a logical tool for political protest. ■

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When GLBT Nonprofits Lose their bearings

BY JOHN TOWNSEND

Tax-deductible nonprofit organizations can invade the pocketbooks and psyches of potential donors, cravenly preying on their fears. When the same-sex marriage movement became a brilliant success, GLBT nonprofit organizations were sucker-punched with a stark existential reality: the biggest battle had been won. So now what?

One would have thought they would recognize that there was still no federal Employment Non-Discrimination Act to stand firmly against job discrimination so that queer individuals could ward off homophobic work practices, solidify job security for same-sex married couples, and strengthen the financial health of GLBT communities. Not to mention that it would have likely met with rural/small town support more so than marriage equality did. Moreover, since 2007 the ENDA was expanded to include gender identity protections. An ideal starting point to introduce the concept of transgenderism.

It took decades for the masses to think reasonably about male homosexuality, lesbianism, and bisexuality. But transgenderism is totally different from sexual orientation. Not only is the general public uneducated in trans concepts, but the trans movement itself has yet to create a concerted, coherent, and *patient* campaign. To begin with, transgender is a different thing to different people, within trans communities and beyond them. Too often activists resort to scolding and shaming when a pronoun is innocently misspoken or a question or glance is presumed to be a micro-aggression. Not good PR, folks.

President Obama didn't even support same-sex marriage until just over five years ago. But he sure got religion about transgenderism in the past year! One of his 2016 executive orders is a questionably crafted item regarding trans toilet facility usage. It was apparent immediately that the ramifications of this had not been thought through. Worse still, GLBT nonprofits, in typical form, rather than inform the GLBT community on how to discuss this incendiary issue, sounded the alarm, triggering GLBT fears, as they cried out for and reeled in money.

After all, nonprofits need to profit inexorably in order to survive and the GLBT community is stereotyped as having deep pockets. This has led to what may be among the most cynical moves in nonprofit history: telling lies about transgender suicides that could not be proved and doing so when the nation seems to be in social upheaval. Such efforts can insidiously plant the ideation and the idealization of suicide in vulnerable minds. This also hurls us back into a darker age when queerness was equated with mental instability. ■

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Missing the diaper years

BY JENNIFER PARELLO

I once asked a friend who works at the post office why there are so many rage shootings at her organization. She thought about it for a moment and then said, “No matter how hard you work, the mail keeps coming. It’s like you climb to the top of a mountain daily, only to find another mountain on top of that one. It can drive you crazy.”

I didn’t truly grasp the frustration of that metaphor until I moved in with my spouse and her two teenaged sons and encountered their laundry room.

When I first moved in, she was living in a house with a large laundry room in the basement. It was fed through a chute from the first floor, which constantly belched out damp towels, bed linens, jeans, and undergarments.

During the months that we dated, she skillfully kept me from visiting this room, which was cordoned off in a dark, foreboding corner of the home’s crypt.

But on the day I moved in, I foolishly asked: “Is there anything I can do to help around the house?” Slowly, a dark grin materialized on her formerly unthreatening face.

“Yes. You can do the laundry.” And then she led me to the room that would forever after be known as My Struggle, which, like the Karl Ove Knausgaard novel of the same name, is a testament to how the tediousness of everyday activity can crush your soul.

I only have a sense memory of the moment I first entered that room. It so traumatized me that I’ve blocked out most of the experience. What I remember feeling is that this room was a sordid sex dungeon for clothes, towels, and socks. It’s where these items went to breed and produce mountains of dirty fabric all wailing to be cleaned and fluffed.

I remember standing in a corner of the room, staring incredulously at

the work in front of me.

“When’s the last time you did laundry?” I asked. She was a single mom, so I assumed she just wasn’t able to keep up with it, and this was a few weeks of laundry build-up.

“Yesterday,” she said, leaving me alone to deal with this nightmare.

As I began shoveling fabric into the washer, I heard a sinister rumble. I turned in terror to see the laundry chute vomiting out a bundle of soiled sheets. This happened throughout the day, usually just as I took what I thought was the final load out of the dryer.

It took me eight hours that first day to complete the laundry. I surveyed the now empty room with exhaustion and delight. I turned smugly toward the now quiet laundry chute and gave it the finger. And then I summoned my spouse to show her of my triumph.

She looked around the room coolly, and then her gaze fell expertly on the chute. “You’d better check that piece of fabric hanging from the laundry chute.”

I walked up to the fabric apprehensively. My first thought was that it was a piece of a bed sheet that had gotten snagged on its journey down the chute. But when I gave it a good tug, it unleashed an avalanche. Dozens of garments that had been trapped in the chute came raining down and buried me.

I lay under the dank fabric and I wept. I cried for my old life, when it took me only a couple hours each week to wash my laundry. I cried for my innocent, carefree past, when I didn’t realize that my greatest enemy would be a metal cylinder that allowed teenagers to easily terrorize me by dropping piles of filthy T-shirts on me from the safety of the first floor.

My spouse gently stroked my hair as I wept. “Welcome to parenting. Just be glad you missed the diaper years.” ■



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IML 2017: Biggest Ever

International Mr. Bootblack Celebrates 25 Years

The 2017 International Mr. Leather (IML) and International Mr. Bootblack (IMBB) contests were held concurrently Thursday, May 25 through Monday, May 29 in Chicago. Host hotel was the Congress Plaza. The contest venue was the Auditorium Theater of Roosevelt University, conveniently across the street from the host hotel.

This year's IML contest was the 39th and included 63 contestants, the most ever. The IMBB competition celebrated its 25th anniversary with three contestants. The weekend attracted over 15,000 visitors to Chicago and generated over \$15 million in tourism revenue for the city.

Contestants came from 24 U.S. states and 11 other countries: Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Israel, Italy, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. This was the first year for contestants from two countries, Brazil (Dom Barbudo, Mr. Leather Brasil) and Finland (Holter Finn, Mr. Fetish Finland 2016).

This also was the first year IML included a Pakistani-American contestant (Ali Mush-taq, Mr. Long Beach Leather 2016), a fact that received coverage in *The New York Times*. Finally, this year's most seasoned contestant (Jon Brittain, Mr. Classic Leather 2017, age 73) also was the most seasoned contestant in 39 years of IML. Brittain was an audience favorite and was selected as one of the top 20 finalists.

Minnesota was represented by Eric "Pup Omega" Stafford, Mr. Minneapolis Eagle 2017, and Ryan Coit, Mr. Twin Cities Leather 2017. Coit was selected as one of the top 20 finalists. Making a surprise appearance helping to announce the top 20 finalists during Sunday's contest was Kevin Cwayna, who was Mr. Minnesota Leather 1997 and brought the International Mr. Leather 1997 title home to Minnesota.

For the first time in 39 years, IML co-founder and executive producer Chuck Renslow was unable to be present to welcome IML attendees because he was under doctor's orders to rest (Renslow watched the contest at home via Skype). Renslow's traditional welcome speech at the opening ceremonies was given by former IML executive director Jon Krongaard, while Renslow's speech during Sunday eve-

ning's contest was delivered by Joe Cervantes, a member of Renslow's family.

The Leather Archives & Museum (LA&M) was prominent during the weekend. At Saturday morning's Chairman's Reception the Centaurs MC of Washington, DC presented the LA&M with a check for \$40,000, part of which will be used to establish an endowment. It was also announced that Rick Storer, LA&M executive director for 15 years, will be leaving and that Christina Court will serve as interim executive director until a new executive director is selected. The LA&M later hosted a screening of Court's new video, *By The People: 25 Years Of Community Archiving at Leather Archives & Museum*, which recently won a CineKink award for Best Documentary Short.

For the first time at IML, the Titans of the Midwest presented three Kink U sessions. The first, especially for IML newbies, was a panel discussion on "What is IML, anyway?". This was followed by a leather history presentation by Rick Storer about Tony DeBlase, creator of the leather pride flag. The final presentation was "Changing Perspectives," another

panel discussion looking at leather through the eyes of pioneering "femme" personalities, one of whom was Emerson Kellogg, Mr. Twin Cities Leather 2016.

Throughout the weekend the famous IML Leather Market offered merchandise from over 50 vendors, including local favorite Twin Cities Leather.

The climax of the weekend arrived Sunday evening with the announcement of the winners of both contests. The runner-up for International Mr. Bootblack 2017 is Rhys, from Australia; the new International Mr. Bootblack 2016 is Ryan "Pawlish" Garner-Carpenter, from Cincinnati.

Second runner-up for IML 2017 is Joe King, Mr. Leather Europe, from the United Kingdom; first runner-up for IML 2017 is Geoff Millard, Mr. San Francisco Leather 2017; and the new International Mr. Leather 2017 is Ralph Bruneau, Mr. GNI Leather 2016, from Los Angeles. Bruneau has a PhD in clinical psychology and is a licensed marriage and family therapist.

Next year will be IML's 40th anniversary, and the host hotel again will be the Congress Plaza in Chicago. ■



On the podium at the conclusion of the 2017 International Mr. Leather contest, left to right: Joe King, Mr. Leather Europe, IML 2017 2nd runner-up; Ryan "Pawlish" Garner-Carpenter, International Mr. Bootblack 2017; Ralph Bruneau, International Mr. Leather 2017; and Geoff Millard, IML 2017 first runner-up.



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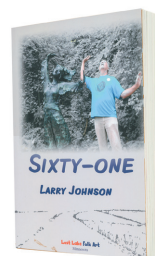
Lepionka's debut introduces private investigator Roxane Weary; she drinks too much, cracks wise (but not over), and mourns the recent death her officer father, one of whose cold cases is the springboard here. A (white) girl went missing fifteen years ago, her (black) boyfriend was convicted and is now on death row. Suddenly his sister claims to have seen the girl and hires Roxane to find her and exonerate her brother. Roxane begins, but the trail seems to intersect with her father's case, another missing teenage girl. In fact, she finds, other local young women have gone missing or been found dead over the years. Police thwart Roxane's efforts to the point of physical violence, but the more pressure applied the more Roxane pushes on. Believable and enjoyably readable.

Sixty-One

Larry Johnson

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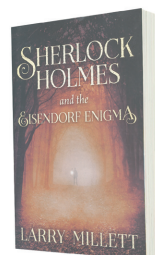
The number 61 has featured large for local author Johnson, and he tells why in 61 short chapters. He ties his junior high (1961) 50-mile hike to the 61-mile hike with grandson Tyler he undertook on his 61st birthday in 1970. One learns that as a Christian conscientious objector, he spent the Vietnam War as an unarmed medic, and that his whole life has been an effort to promote peace through activist storytelling to adults and children. He was one of 11 veterans/activists that worked with sculptor Gita Ghea to make peace bells here in the spirit of the 1918 Armistice. "It is crucial to always negotiate every possible non-violent strategy." Johnson's chapters go down easy, but leave a strong afterthought.

Sherlock Holmes and the Eisendorf Enigma

Larry Millett

University of Minnesota Press

\$25.95



If *The Magic Bullet* was Millett's "locked room" enigma, then *Sherlock Holmes and the Eisendorf Enigma* is his "closed town" mystery. Sherlock Holmes, 66 in 1920, is back in Minnesota at the Mayo Clinic diagnosed with emphysema. There, a note is slipped under his door from an old foe, a murderer who eluded him in Munich in 1892, announcing he's taken up residence in Eisendorf, a nearby, decaying little hamlet, from which he challenges Holmes. The Hatfields and McCoys have nothing on Eisendorf's inhabitants, a secretive, inbred lot with a tunnel-ridden playing field on which Holmes must outwit the killer before the town literally explodes. As readers of the previous six installments may guess, faithful Watson and St. Paul's Shadwell Rafferty put in appearances. Smashing!

LGBT San Francisco: The Daniel Nicoletta

Photographs

Ed. Tony Nourmand

Reel Art Press

\$60



If one picture is worth a thousand words, then this cornucopia of images might leave you speechless. Daniel Nicoletta (b 1954) began photographing queer life in San Francisco some 40 years ago, and has kept at it, documenting drag queens, politicians, and street people. That famous Harvey Milk photo of the grin and the tie? That's a Nicoletta. There are hundreds of photos included here, in black and white and fabulous color. There are the well-knowns, the unknowns, and the beings known for being themselves: Divine, Mae West, Arthur Tress, Armistead Maupin, and on and on. A large, handsome book to savor and treasure for many years to come. And, shhhh! You may want to pinch a few wardrobe and accessory ideas. We won't tell. ■

OUR LAVENDER LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

I wanted to take this opportunity and tell the folks at Lavender what an outstanding job they did on the PRIDE Edition. I have been reading the articles contained in the pages of this edition and they are outstanding. I have learned so much reading this edition and am grateful for your work. I hope that future editions will be just as powerful as this edition. We in the GLBTQA community need a news source that is solid and educates us. We need Lavender to bring the G, L, B, T, Q and A together as a community. I truly appreciate your work and wish you ongoing success.

Blessings, Peace and Love,

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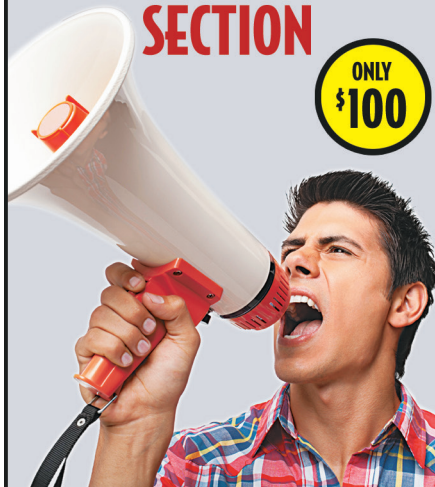
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2017 Audi S6



There are two different kinds of luxury car buyers.

One such buyer wants a car with the badge, the prestige and everything else that comes with it. They want comfort and performance. If you ask them for a sport package or individualization, they might check their bank accounts and pass.

Then, there's the enthusiast. They want more. They want more performance, more individualization, and more attention. They want something special.

That is why luxury car brands offer something for the enthusiasts. Just one look at their decklids will identify these special performance models. BMW has a letter for this: M. Mercedes-Benz applies the AMG badge to their high-performance models. These additional sub brands are available for Lexus, Jaguar, Land Rover, Cadillac, Volvo, and Acura.

For Audi, they're grouped into a subdivision called Audi Sport.

It is not an additional letter or letters, but rather a swap of one for either an S, R, or RS depending on model. In our case, the mild-mannered A6 midsize premium sedan became our S6 tester thanks to the good folks at Audi Sport. Instead of a typical executive sedan, what we have is an extrovert that still wears a fine suit or dress with a few flashy elements.

Why would any of us want the S6 instead of an A6?

First off, the S6 is a subtle machine. It is supposed to be stealthy so not to attract the likes of the police when one speeds along the highway. There is a bit of a rear spoiler, along with an aerodynamic front clip and side skirts to give it a sportier appearance. Our tester came with 19-inch wheels that barely fit over the big brake rotors and huge caliper housing. The reason for this is the use of winter tires on our tester.

Overall, the A6/S6 package is quite substantial, but sleek. The roofline is long, accommodating a big three-window side profile, applied on top of an equally wide side profile. The S6 offers a set of LED front and rear lighting, making it more visible at night. In all, it is very handsome even if it does look like almost every model in the Audi lineup.

The same critique could be made inside. There is a lot of Audi's current technologies shared across the lineup; the virtual cockpit and MMI infotainment, for example. However, the S6 offers a unique mix of luxury and sport to coddle drivers and their passengers on sporting excursions. After a few moments, all of the controls will seem logical and good to the touch, even though there are some questions about actual placement

and operation. The cruise control stalk is on the left and needs a bit of learning to get it working right. We wished there were more steering wheel controls that worked the MMI system equally than the actual controls on the center console. These are just a few nitpicks.

Yet, it all comes together from a command center anchored by a set of high-back leather seats with quilted leather surfaces and strong bolstering. Power adjustments are made for height, rake, recline, and lumbar. The cushion extender also helps. Front space is fine, though rear seat space may appear to be limited. This is due to a cockpit-type floor and a high center "hump." Taller passengers might be challenged by the roofline in the rear. Trunk space is decent at 14.1 cubic feet. The rear seats fold down for expandable cargo.

We mentioned the MMI infotainment system a few times. It is controlled by a center knob on the console with peripheral buttons next to it. A screen comes out of the dashboard to prop itself against it in a tablet-like stance. The system includes varying audio options, including Apple CarPlay and Android Auto compatibility. A clean navigation is driven by Google, including a Google Earth and Street View. There is Wi-Fi through Audi Connect, using a 4G LTE hotspot. Bose drives 14 speakers of superior sound with available surround sound settings.

Power comes from a turbocharged 4.0-liter V8. With 450 horsepower on tap, one would describe the S6 as a silent beast. At speed, it is very quiet. The only time you hear the exhaust note is at startup and when you need to press the accelerator to pass someone. It is also extremely quick. It is also pretty thirsty, unless you consider the 21.3 MPG average as "thirsty." Performance cars usually drink more of their share of the finer grades of gasoline.

Attached to the powerful V8 is a seven-speed dual-clutch S-Tronic transmission and Audi's quattro all-wheel drive system. Combined, the S6's power is smoothly and quickly transferred to all four wheels with equal ease. The shifts were quick and torque delivery for maximum grip were nothing short of superb.

Audi offers a few settings to adjust the driving dynamics. Through Audi Drive Select, this S6 can be a smooth highway cruiser or a corner carver. The Dynamic setting tightens up the steering weight, throttle, and transmission response for a more exciting drive. A driver can also customize their feel through the Individual setting or let the system do its work in the Auto setting.

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In every setting, the S6 is a solid driver capable of comfortable cruising at any speed. The ride quality is superb, though road imperfections are felt with the best dampening job possible. Handling is quite superb with sharp cornering and a lack of roll and lean through the turns. The suspension never felt firm, which might turn off sports car lovers. For a big sedan, this actually is a huge advantage.

The steering system is terrific. It responds extremely well from the wheel with excellent road feel. The turning radius is actually quite good for a car of its size. We also mentioned the large brake rotors and calipers on this S6. It translated into superb braking response and feel with great stops in normal and panic situations. However, we hoped the pedals would be spaced a bit more away from each other for better response.

Audi offers a lot of active safety features to keep the S6 on task. Blind spot monitoring is done with some very bright lights located on the side mirrors, while there is lane keep assist, forward collision warning, adaptive cruise control, rearview camera with a 360-degree view, and cross-

traffic alert. The camera system has a great front view, as well. Audi's pre-sense system provides the driver audible, visual, and physical collision warnings when a situation is detected from its radar system. To top it all off, the S6 came with a headup display with clear readings that helped enhance the drive.

Pricing for the S6 starts at \$70,900. Our Prestige package tester came with a sticker price of \$82,425. If the S6 is too much for your palette, the A6 comes with a choice of a turbocharged four-cylinder or a supercharged V6. Pricing for the A6 starts at \$47,600.

It is safe to say that the Audi S6 is a desirable machine that delivers performance smoothly without all of the drama. It is a fine executive performance sedan without drawing attention to itself.

These are key points in choosing something special in the luxury car field. One can go with a mere Audi A6 and simply drive it like a normal car. But, for those occasions when you need all of the power and luxury one can deliver is a finely tailored suit, the S6 is a very good choice. ■




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OUR VOICES

SKIRTING THE ISSUES | BY ELLEN KRUG

Moose Lake

There is no Them. There are only facets of Us.

— John Green, American author

I'm standing in a room—a gymnasium, actually—posing for a picture with several GLBT-identifying humans in Moose Lake, Minnesota.

Only, this isn't just any ordinary gymnasium; rather, it's part of a facility that houses many of Minnesota's sex offenders. I've read that these are the worst of the worst when it comes to the state's sexual deviants.

Originally, I didn't want to be here. When "Father Harry" (a Minneapolis-based Catholic Apostolic deacon) called last year asking me to visit his "congregation" in Moose Lake, I put him off. "I've got a lot going on," I answered. "Maybe sometime down the road."

Truthfully, I wanted nothing to do with Moose Lake. Even though my remaining life mission is working to increase inclusivity for those who society considers "other," I believed that some people can't be "included" because they're just evil or beyond becoming "good."

Or so I thought.

It turned out that Harry—he's fine with the informality—was quite persistent. Every couple months, there he was with a call or an email: "How about visiting Moose Lake?"

Eventually, Harry wore me down. "Okay," I said. "But only if you come with me."

Thus, I found myself driving up I-35 on one of the few sunny days in May sitting next to a gray-haired sixty-five-year-old in black priest garb (including the white collar) who sported a big fat silver cross around his neck.

For a former survivor of Catholic upbringing with all its intolerance and guilt and resulting self-hatred, this was a bit unsettling.

"I haven't ever had the white collar/cross combination in my car before," I said to Harry. "I'm feeling some PTSD."

My passenger laughed. "I used to be Roman, too," he replied. "That was before I came out as gay."

Harry and I have much in common—both of us grew up in the '60s and '70s when living authentically was taboo; we had each married and had children; we each also had our own moment of truth that caused us to divert course. Now here we were each with a mission of wanting to make the world a better place.

It's just that Harry's mission work is with a population that most of society abhors.

I abhorred them too. That is, until I got to know them a bit.

The event in the Moose Lake gymnasium was meant to commemorate Pride Month, with me as the guest speaker. Before I took the stage, a half-dozen "clients" (some of whom identified as transgender women)

put on a program that included sharing the names of past and present GLBT politicians, actors, and sports figures and educating on the meaning of the rainbow and transgender flag colors. Even more, with the ring of a way-too-small bell, they read the name of each of the 49 people murdered at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando last year.

The program was touching and clearly the organizers and participants had heart—real heart for each other and for GLBT humans who have suffered.

I really didn't know what I'd say when I got up to speak. My usual Pride Month pitch is to share a bit of my personal story as a confused and afraid human and then speak about the essential human quality of living one's life with authenticity regardless of whether one is GLBT or straight or whatever else. Usually, I gently encourage listeners to engage in some self-reflection and then make the appropriate changes to live more authentically.

That pitch was a bit problematic for Moose Lake. It's not as if any of the "clients" are free to make dramatic life changes in terms of career, romantic relationships, or just about anything else. These people—say what you will about why they are here—are stuck.

Stuck in a system which is presently the subject of a federal lawsuit because, frankly, it almost never releases a "client" back into society. (Note: folks are placed in Moose Lake—a civil commitment facility—only after they serve their criminal sentences.) When you consider that approximately 60 of the 700 or so "clients" were juveniles when they offended (and are now into their 20s, 30s, or older), you get a real sense of what it means to be "stuck."

What I did tell the "clients" is that whether they knew it or not, they were survivors with real grit and resiliency. I offered that "gut tugs" of authenticity won't leave one alone until they live as their true self, regardless of physical setting. Finally, I urged them to have compassion for others and for themselves.

As I finished, I looked around the room and saw tearful eyes—both among clients and the staff. Clearly, everyone in Moose Lake is struggling in one way or another.

My visit to Moose Lake re-taught me a lesson that I often share with others: the power of becoming familiar with "other."

Almost inevitably, familiarity helps us understand that "other" is just another phrase for struggling human. ■

Important note to readers: The GLBT residents at Moose Lake feel terribly isolated. Father Harry has asked for volunteers who might be willing to occasionally write to these folks. If you have an interest, please email Harry at happyhartigan47@gmail.com.

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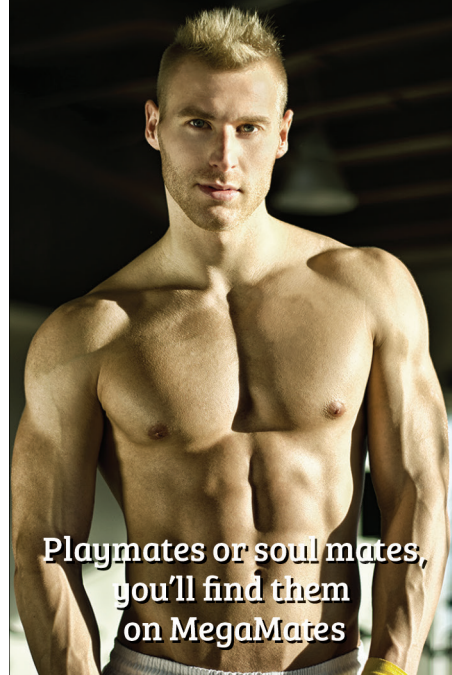
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Adult DB Graphics.....33 Megaphone.....41	Funeral Services Choice Cremation.....24 David Lee Funeral Homes & Cremation Services.....24 Washburn-McReavy Funeral Chapels & Cremation.....25	Media & Communications Radio K 770.....29
Agencies Imagehaus.....38	Gifts Outloud Promotions.....39	Optical North Suburban Eye Specialists.....29 InVision.....11 Origins Eye Clinic.....5
Apparel & Accessories Top 2 Bottom.....39 QG - Fashion Revolution.....39	Health & Wellness Modern Eyewear.....15 Abilene Mill City.....25 Dr. Paul Amble, DDS.....10 China Institute of Traditional Chinese Medicine.....24 Irene Green, MSEd.....38 Linden Hills Dentistry.....29 Mill District Dental.....15 Julie Childs, MSW, LCSW, LADC.....39 PREP.....9 Pride Institute.....41 Right at Home.....24 University of Minnesota, Infectious Diseases 2 Uptown Dermatology & SkinSpa.....31 Veil Orthodontics.....13	Organizations Lutheran Social Services of Minnesota.....5 Red Door Clinic.....32
Arts & Entertainment Electric Fetus.....35 Hennepin Theatre Trust.....13 Ordway Center for the Performing Arts.....11	Home Furnishings & Accessories Habitation.....5	Pet Products & Services International Wolf Center.....28 U of M College of Veterinary Medicine.....15
Automotive Borton Volvo.....36 Green Garage.....35 laMetry's Collision.....35 Rosedale Chevrolet.....35	Home Services Altus Architecture.....6 House Lift Remodeler.....27 Owens Companies.....27 Puustelli USA.....8 Select Surfaces.....4 Standard Heating & Air Conditioning.....5	Real Estate & Rentals Brad Bemowski - Coldwell Banker Burnet.....38 Farinella, Marilyn.....39 Ruzick, Amy & Johnson, Kay.....39
Bars & Nightlife 19 Bar.....33 The Commodore Bar & Restaurant.....3 Gay 90's.....32	Insurance Baldwin, Davina.....39 Bartell, Dawn.....23 Pam Peterson, American Family Insurance.....39	Restaurants Burger Moe's.....19 Cecil's Deli.....15 Icehouse.....23 Mercy.....19 Red Cow.....13 The Sample Room.....13 VWA, Frost and Company.....3 Wilde Cafe & Spirits.....39
Beauty & Relaxation Omni Plastic Surgery.....7	Jewelry Max's.....26 Scheherazade Jewelers.....13 Wedding Day Diamonds.....5	Sports & Recreation Minnesota Twins.....7 Osseo Power Sports.....35
Beverages Lowry Hill Liquors, Lakeside Wine & Spirits 19 Miss Mary's Mix.....23	Legal Cloutier Law Offices.....31 Jerry Burg, Attorney at Law.....11 Unique Estate Law.....25	Tobacco Products Vaping Studio.....33
Dating Services The Love Architects.....6	Travel & Accommodations AC Hotel.....7	Wedding Resources Burbank Livingston Griggs Mansion.....3 The Commodore Bar & Restaurant.....3 Hotel 340.....3 Saint Paul Athletic Club.....3 Stout's Island Lodge.....3 The University Club of Saint Paul.....3 The Woman's Club of Minneapolis.....28
Department Stores Target.....44		
Event Venues & Services Bartending by Drew.....38		
Events Lavender First Thursdays.....43 Lavender's Score Thursdays.....43		
Financial Angie Sherer, LeaderOne Financial.....39 Roya Mollaj, Charterpoint Wealth Strategies.....29 Sunrise Banks.....4 Wells Fargo Bank.....31		



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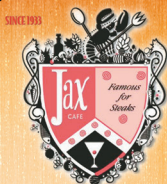
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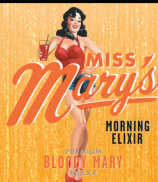
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